(c) Steps taken to increase the procurement of iron ore from different sectors in Orissa include grant of production incentive to the mineowners to increase supplies and preparation of project report for development of Paradip Port to receive larger vessels.

Proposal to set up a Steel Plant in Orissa

359. SHRI BAIKUNTHA NATH SAHU: Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to set up a steel plant in Orissa;

(b) if so, the site selected for the location of the second steel plant;

(c) whether that second steel plant is proposed to be set up during the 8th Plan Period; and

(d) if so, the steps being taken in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI DINESH GOSWAMI): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. There is a proposal for setting up a new steel plant near Daitari in Orissa.

(c) and (d) The proposal is for starting work on this project during the 8th Plan. This would depend on the resource position which can only be known when the 8th Plan is finalised.

Acceptance of Telephone and Electricity Bills by Commercial Banks

360. SHRI BAIKUNTHA NATH SAHU: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to direct all the commercial banks operating in the cities to accept telephone and electricity bills;

(b) if so, when such directives are likely to be issued;

(c) what are the reasons for which the nationalised commercial banks are not accepting telephone and electricity bills at present; and

(d) what steps are being taken to implement the above proposal so that the customers are not put to any inconvenience?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE): (a) to (d) Acceptance of Electricity and Telephone bills is not primarily connected with Banking operation. The individual banks enter into an arrangement with the concerned public bodies and offer such services on a selective basis, on the basis of their commercial judgement and business considerations. There is no proposal under consideration of the Government to issue any directives to the banks in this regard. However the banks have been advised by RBI to explore the feasibility of extending such personalised services in a larger measure at certain selected branches.

External Debt and Foreign Exchange Reserves

361. SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the total outstanding external debt of the country as on 30th November, 1989;

(b) the foreign exchange reserves of the country at the end of November, 1989;

(c) the amount held in the accounts of non-resident Indians; and

(d) whether Government consider the situation precarious and if so, what steps are proposed to be taken to meet the situation?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE): (a) Final figures of external debt outstanding are available till March 31, 1989. The total External Debt of the country as on that date was Rs. 68831 crores.

(b) the foreign exchange reserves of the country as at the end of November 1989 were Rs. 5045 crores.

(c) The cumulative deposits by the Non-Resident Indians as at the end of March 1989 were Rs. 14154 crores.

(d) The external debt position of the country at the moment is within manageable limits. The level of country's external debt and likely burden of debt servicing are being constantly kept in view to ensure that they remain within prudent limits. Government have taken a number of steps to boost export and increase invisible earnings, contain imports, improve

disbursement of committed aid/loans and to ensure that dependence on external financing is progressively reduced.

Electoral reforms to discourage non-serious candidates to contest as independents

362. SHRI P. N. SUKUL:
SHRIMATI SUDHA VIJAY JOSHI:

Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) how many candidates filed their nominations as independents for the Lok Sabha elections held recently;

(b) how many of them were elected as Members of Parliament and how many lost their deposits; and

(c) whether Government are considering to introduce reforms in the electoral laws with a view to discouraging non-serious candidates from contesting elections as independents?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI DINESH GOSWAMI): (a) 3634 independent candidates filed their nominations for the Lok Sabha Elections, 1989.

(b) 13 independent candidates were elected. Number of candidates who forfeited deposits is being collected from the concerned Chief Electoral Officers.

(c) This is among the proposals presently under the consideration of Government.

Total votes polled by different parties in the General Elections

363. SHRIMATI SUDHA VIJAY JOSHI:
SHRI RAJNI RANJAN SAHU:

Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) the approximate percentage of the total votes polled in favour of different national parties in the General Elections to Lok Sabha held recently; and

(b) the corresponding figures in the General Elections held in 1984?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI DINESH GOSWAMI): (a) and (b) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Franchise exercised by the youths in 18 to 21 years of age group in the General Elections

364. SHRIMATI SUDHA VIJAY JOSHI: Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that many youths in the 18 to 21 years of age group got voting rights during the General Elections to Lok Sabha, held recently;

(b) if so, what is the approximate percentage of those who exercised their franchise in the General Elections; and

(c) whether any study relating to their reaction in getting voting rights have been conducted?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI DINESH GOSWAMI): (a) The voting age having been reduced to 18 through an amendment to article 326 of the Constitution, all those who had attained the age of 18 as on 1st April, 1989, got such voting rights.

(b) The Election Commission has informed that 35.7 million persons in the age group of 18 to 21, had been added to the electorate for the recent Lok Sabha elections and youths in large numbers had also participated in the elections. However, no compiled statistics are available regarding the exact number of persons in this age group who had actually voted.

(c) Lowering of the voting age has been welcomed by everyone including the youths